JULY 2 - AUG. 9 1974

Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library Exhibits Area

Robarts Library Exhibits Area

Sir Edmund Walker

1848-1924

A Notable Canadian

Born on a farm near Caledonia on October 14, 1848, Byron Edmund Walker was the son of Alfred Walker and his wife Fanny Murton. His grandfather Thomas, had emigrated to Canada with his family in the early 1830's.

His youth was a happy one. "At home I never heard money talked about except perhaps the need for it. We talked about flowers, music, fossils, science, a new poem. Nothing very learned or difficult". Considered too delicate to continue his education, he began his business career at the age of 12 in a "bureau de change" owned by his uncle, Mr. J.W. Murton of Hamilton.

The Canadian Bank of Commerce

In the summer of 1868 he entered the Hamilton office of the Canadian Bank of Commerce. In 1873 he was sent to New York as Third Agent. A year later, he married Mary Alexander of Hamilton, a sister of Professor W.J. Alexander, first head of the English Department at the University of Toronto.

He returned to Canada and became successively Manager in Windsor, then in London Ontario, Inspector at the head office in Toronto, and then Manager in Hamilton. In 1881 he was appointed Joint Agent in New York, and returned to Toronto in 1886 as General Manager of the Bank. In 1907, in his 59th year, he became President - a position he held until his death in 1924.

The University of Toronto

After the University College fire of 1890, the President of the University Sir Daniel Wilson called on Mr. Walker and a number of Toronto business men to help raise funds for new buildings. Mr. Walker was asked to join the Board of Trustees the following year. Two years later he was appointed to the Senate and the Chancellor, Mr. Edward Blake asked him to "report on the financial position of the University, and somehow I have had its finances in my charge ever since". In Professor G.P. de T. Glazebrook's book Sir Edmund Walker he writes: "to tell the story of Walker's connection with the University would be to rewrite a great deal of its history".

Art Gallery of Ontario

In 1900, the Ontario Society of Artists headed by their President, Mr. George A. Reid called a meeting to discuss plans for an art gallery in Toronto. Walker became Chairman of the committee formed. A bill was subsequently passed by the Provincial Legislature incorporating the Art Museum of Toronto. The problem

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of finding a suitable building was solved when Mrs. Goldwin Smith approached Walker with the suggestion of bequeathing the "Grange" for this purpose. The first part of the gallery was opened in 1918. The sculpture court was named in Sir Edmund's honour.

The National Gallery of Canada

Sir Edmund became Chairman of the Board of Trustees in 1913 having been appointed to the Advisory Arts Council with Sir George Drummond and Senator Arthur Boyer in 1907. F.B. Housser wrote in A Canadian Art Movement (1926) that "Sir Edmund seems to have been the only business man of wide influence in Canada who was conscious of the forces, which were shaping events at the period which (Lawren) Harris has called "The dawn of a spiritual consciousness in our people". He alone, of all the men of affairs in the Dominion, showed a personal human interest in painters. He alone seemed to see the necessity of creative expression in the building of nationhood and publicly declared it".

In his own collection of paintings was the sketch of Tom Thomson's "Northern River".

The Royal Ontario Museum

Sir Edmund played a leading role in the development of the Royal Ontario Museum. As early as 1888 he had urged the establishement of a Natural History Survey of the Province of Ontario and a museum, but it was not until Premier Sir James Whitney came to

power that funds were voted. Sir Edmund was Chairman of the Board of Trustees (1912-1924) and when the Royal Ontario Museum was officially opened by the Duke of Connaught, March 19, 1914, Sir Robert Falconer, President of the University in his speech at the opening ceremony said "we owe the existence of the museum as it stands this afternoon to his (Sir Edmund's) efforts".

The Champlian Society

In 1905 in conversation with Dr. James Bain, Professor George Wrong and Dr. Charles Colby, Sir Edmund conceived the idea of founding in Canada a publishing society similar to the Surtees and Hakluyt in Great Britain. Its purpose was to undertake the publication of rare books and unpublished manuscripts relating to Canada. The name "Suggesting itself by spontaneous conbustion".

He took an active interest in the preparation of each volume, and wrote the preface to Volume 6, Hearne's journey from Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson Bay, to the Northern Ocean, 1769-1772.

For further information see the display of the publications of the Champlain Society, Exhibits Area - 2nd floor, Robarts Library.